

Guidelines for External Reviews of Interdisciplinary Studies Programs

An overview of the external review process

Union considers external reviews one of the most important ways in which it assesses and ensures the effectiveness of its interdisciplinary studies programs. They occur for each program on a ten-year cycle and consist of six steps:

- (a) Under leadership of the Program Director, the program steering committee (or equivalent)¹, conducts a self-study whose results are reported to the external review team, the President, the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs (**Year #1**);
- (b) During a two-day visit to the Union campus, the external review team conducts an independent and in-depth review of the program (**Year #1**);
- (c) The external review team issues a report of its findings and recommendations, which is sent to the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs, who in turn distributes it to the Program director and the Dean of the Faculty. The report should be made available to all the tenure-track faculty members on the program steering committee. Although not required, the program may prepare a written response for the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs (**Year #1**);
- (d) The self-study, external team report, and the optional departmental response is sent to the AAC for review. The AAC drafts questions arising from the review, for the Department's consideration. After meeting with the department Chair, the AAC prepares a letter to the Dean of the Faculty (with copies to the department Chair and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs) presenting their advice on how best to respond to the recommendations of the external review team (**Year #2**);
- (e) The Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees considers the external review team's report and the AAC's letter (**Year #2**);
- (f) After 4 years (**5 years after the team visit**), the program formally assesses its progress towards achieving the recommendations arising out of the external review and sends a report (3-4 pages is sufficient) to the Dean of Faculty and Dean of Academic Departments. All tenure-track members of the program steering committee should sign this report indicating that they have been consulted in its preparation. This report should not bring up issues or needs beyond those already addressed in the external review. **This report can serve as a replacement for the annual assessment report. (Year #5).**

The program self-study

The program faculty will conduct a self-study that will provide the external reviewers with extensive information about the faculty, the curriculum, the facilities, and the students. Topics covered in the self-study will normally include:

¹ At the outset of the process, the Program Director(s) and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs will confirm the list of faculty who will be involved in the self-study and the external review process.

- (a) College Description: a brief introduction to the College, its mission and a concise statement of the priorities of the Strategic Plan;
 - (b) Program Description: the mission and/or vision statement of the program, the number of faculty and departments contributing to the program; general descriptions of the program and relationships to other programs; program-specific space or facilities; program-related grants, gifts, prizes, or collections; and any publications about the program;
 - (c) Faculty Information: faculty ranks, years in service, areas of specialization, research interests, publication records, grant support, courses taught for the program, etc. A *curriculum vitae* should be provided for each faculty member considered core to the program, as well as a brief statement of future scholarly or curricular plans as they relate to the program;
 - (d) Curriculum Information: degree requirements, programs for majors, ways in which program courses contribute to General Education and Writing-Across-the-Curriculum requirements, course descriptions (syllabi), enrollment figures for the past 3 years enrollment data—raw data and compiled comparison tables—are available on the Chairs and Directors Nexus page), future course revisions and curricular plans;
 - (e) Student Information: number of majors/minors, demographic breakdown of majors/minors;
 - (f) Staffing, Curricular and Facilities Plans and Needs: identification of staffing, curricular and/or space and facilities plans and needs for the next ten years in order to meet the program’s vision and mission;
 - (g) Questions and Concerns: The program should provide the review committee with a list of possible questions or concerns to which they might respond to assist the program in planning for the future.
- (g) An appendix that contains all recent annual assessment reports from the program

The self-study should involve the participation of **all** tenure-track faculty members of the department who are not on leave. This important undertaking should **not** be carried out only by the Chair or a small subset of the tenure-track faculty. At the discretion of the Chair, Lecturers may also be invited to help with the preparation of the self-study report. **When completed, please send hard copies (unless electronic is requested) of the self-study report to each member of the external review team, and to the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs. In addition, please send electronic copies of the self-study to the President (and the President’s Assistant, Bobbi Nelson), the Dean of the Faculty, and all other individuals slated to meet with the review team. The report should be shared at least 2 weeks before the date of the campus visit.**

Selection of the external reviewers

The program leadership will prepare for the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs a list of at least 20 individuals who would be qualified to serve on the external review team. Using this list as a starting point, the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs will select three or four reviewers. Normally one or two will be selected from research universities and one or two from primarily undergraduate colleges. Every effort will be made to include women and minority scholars on the committee. Final selections are determined by the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs in consultation with the program Director(s). The Dean will pay the travel and meal expenses of the reviewers as well as an honoraria for each.

Hosting the visit of the external review team

The campus visit normally lasts two full days. The Director(s) of the program arranges for hotel accommodations for the team (Stockade Inn, Hampton Inn and Glen Sanders Mansion are recommended) and suggests a restaurant for dinner(s). These expenses will be paid by the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs according to current College-wide standards. In addition, the Director(s) should reserve a room that can serve as an operations base for the visiting team. Refreshments should be available for the team throughout the day.

The schedule for the visit should include:

- (a) A 1.5 hour opening meeting with the Dean of the Faculty, the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs, and the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies;
- (b) Individual interviews with all the tenure-track faculty, visiting faculty and Lecturers who make significant contributions to the program;
- (c) Interviews with the Chairs of departments and Directors of other programs that interact regularly with the program under review on matters of curriculum, staffing, equipment purchasing, etc.;
- (d) Interviews with the Chair of the AAC and the Dean of Studies (may be a joint interview)
- (e) Interviews with students (usually majors in the program), possibly with lunch;
- (f) A 30-minute meeting with the Dean of Academic Planning and Resources to talk about the program budget;
- (g) A 1 ½-hour exit interview jointly with the President, the Dean of the Faculty, and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs in Feigenbaum Hall. The President joins the meeting for the final 30 min of the exit interview.

If possible, the schedule should include some time for the review team to meet amongst themselves to gather their thoughts prior to the exit meeting with the Deans and the President. At the very least, the team should have dinner on their own after the first full day of meetings to enable discussion about the team's observations about the day's meetings without department members present.

The report from the external review team

The external reviewers will be asked to assess the program from the following perspectives. They may also address other areas if they consider them important.

- Vision and Mission
- Curriculum and connections to departments and other programs
- Number of contributing faculty and range of sub-specialties
- Faculty scholarship
- Facilities
- Engagement of students and student satisfaction
- Budget
- Assessment and long-range planning
- Support staff
- Effectiveness of the program leadership
- Collegiality and cooperation within the program
- Contributions from departments
- Questions specifically addressed to the team in the self-study report

The team will also be asked to make suggestions for future development in any of these areas. The final report will be submitted to the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs who will forward copies to the Dean of the Faculty and the program Director(s). The Director(s) will, in turn, share it with all the tenure-track faculty members who contribute to the program.

Letter from the program responding to the external review report

As an optional step, the program may respond to the external review report with a letter to the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs. The letter should be signed by all the tenure-track faculty members who contribute to the program acknowledging that they have read both the external team's report and the program's letter of response. Any faculty member who does not concur with the contents of the letter must be invited to attach a letter describing their reasons.

Review of the external review report by the Academic Affairs Council

The report and the *optional* program letter, if any, will be submitted to the AAC except for those sections or appendices that deal with personnel matters or are of a confidential nature. After meeting with the program Director(s), the AAC will issue a letter to the Dean of the Faculty and the program leadership in which it will present its recommendations for future action. The AAC's letter is to be made available to all the tenure-track faculty members who contribute to the program.

The Mid-Term Progress Report (MTPR) from the program

During the 4th year after the year of the external review (during year #5 where the year of the external review campus visit counts as year #1) the program leadership prepares a 3-4 page mid-

term report on its success at implementing the recommendations of the external review team and the AAC. Please organize the MTPR so that each recommendation of the external review team or the AAC is stated separately and followed by a description of the actions the program has taken to address each one. All the tenure-track faculty members who contribute to the program should sign this report indicating that they have been consulted in its preparation. This report should **not** bring up new issues or needs beyond those addressed in the previous external review.

Copies of the MTPR should be sent to the AAC, the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs. This program progress assessment completes the external review cycle.